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Vivisection  
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Caird, Mona (Alison)

Vivisection [Letter]

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# VIVISECTION.

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*Reprint from a letter to the Editor of the "Manchester Guardian."*

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SIR,

It is interesting to notice in the correspondence on vivisection that is going on in your columns, how the argument tends to rage round the point that is really unessential: viz., whether or not certain scientific knowledge has been obtained by means of experiment on living animals.

To rivet attention on this side issue, as if it were the main principle at stake, is the natural policy of the vivisector, for on the moral ground what can possibly be urged by him which does not at once open the door to the justification of all crime that can boast an important object? It is well to keep in mind the fact that if the point at issue were once admitted to be simply: whether the gain in knowledge is great enough to counterweigh all the vast expenditure of time and public money and talent involved in it, and the loss to research of other kinds, then we should all be committed to the following theorem:— "Atrocious cruelty may be perpetrated if it can be shown to be for the advancement of science; but this special licence for cruelty is granted only when the object is scientific, and in no other case whatever—for reasons (as Mrs. Carlyle says), 'which it would be interesting not to state.'"

It would certainly not be interesting to vivisectors to attempt to explain why science should thus be selected for particular favour by the State, and why that favour should be the permission to practise terrible cruelties under certain (very lax) conditions. That the cruelties of vivisection *are* terrible can, of course, be proved up to the hilt from the works of the vivisectors themselves.

It is true that every powerful interest since the world began has set up the same claim to special privileges in crime, but why we, at the end of the Nineteenth Century, should submit to the tyranny is indeed hard to understand. The Church of the Middle Ages committed crimes of cruelty in the name of *her* special interests, but we all regard her conduct as the outcome of

the darkest ignorance and superstition. Yet her claims were made in the same spirit as that in which physiologists make their claims to-day. The objects of the cruelty, we are assured, are so all-important. What are the pangs of a few heretics (or a few rabbits) compared with the salvation of human souls (or the welfare of human bodies)? When the groans of tortured wretches sounded in the dungeons of the Inquisition—as the groans of creatures who have offended neither Church nor State are sounding at this moment in the laboratories of Science—the leaders of the Church never dreamt that they were guilty of terrible crimes, and they easily convinced the public that they were indeed servants of heaven. The arguments of those who can practically demonstrate their views are ever convincing.

But this permission by the State to use cruelty and crime for special purposes, however good these purposes, ought surely to be recorded as a tyrannical absurdity of the Dark Ages only. And indeed no civilised nation now permits its religion to enforce her doctrines by rack and stake. By legitimate means alone may she make her converts; and this protection to the general safety is secured by the same prohibition of licence in the case of all other institutions and bodies and interests *except one*, and that one, strange to say, is that which claims to have loosened the bonds of tyranny and to have brought enlightenment to the whole human race!

That so tyrannical, so unjust, so mediæval a claim should be made by Science herself, who was for so long the victim of superstitious oppression, is indeed a strange and discouraging fact. It seems as if one form of tyranny were only destroyed to make room for another; and so on *ad infinitum*. Certain it is that Science now stands in the path of progress, pointing us back to mediæval views as regards morality, setting up the very same claim that was set up by Superstition herself—her predecessor in power,—and demanding that her own particular ends and objects shall be placed above all the laws of right and wrong, and shall be allowed to override every consideration of justice and of mercy.

Science now claims to pursue legitimate ends by *illegitimate means*, refusing to limit her operations to those that can be

followed by harmless methods, a limitation that every other pursuit is bound by law to respect.

The vivisector's claim becomes eloquent through its moving appeal to our selfishness. By the torture of our defenceless fellow-creatures, who have to find in us their Providence, we may hope (so we are assured) to escape some of the sufferings entailed upon our race by its sin and folly—which is another way of saying that there is no such thing as a moral law in the universe.

Can any believer in such a law venture to assert that the human race could possibly derive eventual good from deliberate evil? Will he dare to say that by the attempt to wring physical benefit out of the anguish of our helpless dependents, we shall really be rewarded by health of body without detriment to that of mind and conscience?

Supposing that some important discovery were made by this method, is it conceivable that it would not cost us a hundred—nay, a thousandfold in evil what it seemed to bestow of benefit?

Let those who believe that right and wrong are real distinctions, think for a moment of the stream of evil tendency set flowing by the vast amount of torturing research which led to the discovery; of the influence on the minds and hearts of hundreds and thousands of human beings; of the inevitable temptations to push researches further, and to test results of animal experimentation on human subjects: let them remember the innate cruelty and selfishness of the human heart, which cannot fail to be emphasised, if not dangerously inflamed by familiarity with the idea of this terrible outrage; and then let them judge whether that particular discovery (which, after all, might have been made by legitimate means) produces real and lasting benefit to the human race.

The moral loss, and therefore the loss to progress as a whole, is absolutely beyond calculation.

But even if physical health *alone* be considered, there is still nothing gained, but on the contrary everything lost, for it can hardly be denied that the physical condition of a people eventually follows their moral condition with absolute fidelity.

Indeed, the whole argument for vivisection and for its utility seems to imply *a denial of the unity of the creation and of the con-*

*sistency of natural laws, physical and moral.* It is in truth, a most unscientific doctrine. If vivisection be, in the profounder sense, scientifically right, then it must follow that what we call the moral law is scientifically ridiculous ; and that to "do justice and love mercy" would eventually bring destruction on a too chivalrous nation, while cruelty and selfishness and abuse of power over the weak, would, in the long run, be rewarded by peace and true well-being.

Are the supporters of the doctrine of salvation by vivisection prepared to accept this view of the universal government? If they are *not* so prepared, then they reduce themselves to logical absurdity. In short, to discuss the moral or the philosophical aspects of the question is to expose the hopeless weakness of the vivisectional position, and it is for this reason that a pro-vivisector either consciously or instinctively veers off from these really essential considerations and pins our attention to points of technical detail, or disputes as to the utility of particular experiments. While the physiologists can keep us all wrangling over these matters, their work, of course, continues unmolested. Even as I write animals of all kinds—dogs, cats, pigeons, frogs, horses, besides the despised rabbits that one hears so much of—are enduring anguish such as most of us scarcely dare even to think of ; and the practice is spreading rapidly year by year. Surely for the committing of such deeds no profession should hold a charter ; surely the people of England, who have righted many wrongs and have always prided themselves on being the first to render justice to the oppressed, will not fail much longer to come to the rescue of the most piteous of all suffering—suffering that is dumb and inexpressibly helpless, absolutely without meaning to the victims, and through which shines not one ray of faith or hope. It seems sadly late in the day to have to urge upon English people that cruelty is a crime, whether it be perpetrated by priest or prophet, by layman or professor, and that the man of science has no more right than other men to pursue his aims and objects—be they good, bad, or indifferent—by cruel and atrocious methods.—Yours, &c.,


MONA CAIRD.

Cassencary, Creetown, N.B., *September 11th, 1895.*

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